



QUINTON D. LUCAS
Mayor

February 10, 2021

Thank you Pastor Thompson. Thank you Mr. Walsh. Good evening to my Council colleagues and all of you in Kansas City on a cold night from Winnetonka High School in Kansas City's Northland. I hope you, your family, and your friends are safe and healthy as we visit tonight—after a year that saw much tragedy, much dissension, but also now, an opportunity to look ahead at how we can build an even stronger, safer, and healthier community.

As many of you know, I grew up in Kansas City and for just about 50 years, to be a Kansas Citian was to know Chiefs football teams that competed well and admirably, but often fell short of the big game. That's why I am as humbled this year, as I was last year, to be visiting with you only days after a Chiefs Super Bowl appearance. While the result this year was not what we had hoped, we are so very proud of our team's performance, their involvement in their community, and their ability to unite a diverse city and region. As a child of the 1980s and 1990s in Kansas City, I would be remiss if I didn't mention that much of the excitement, the passion, and the devotion we see today in Chiefs Kingdom was inspired by Coach Marty Schottenheimer, who passed away earlier this week. We thank him for the years of success, the motivational comments on team work, and the inspiration he brought to a community.

We also think this week about someone much younger, a five-year-old girl injured critically in an accident outside Arrowhead Stadium days before the Super Bowl. We pray for her and her family and we hope that our authorities help all who loved her find solace in obtaining justice in connection with this tragic incident.

Like our recent week, our past year has been punctuated by the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. A year ago, hundreds of thousands of Kansas Citians and our neighbors crowded onto the streets of downtown to celebrate our world champions. Only weeks later, we would see our streets deserted through downtown as we limited the spread of the greatest public health threat this nation has faced in over a century.

I pose three important questions for us tonight:

First: How do we learn from the past year about health, our economy, and our budget to move more responsibly into the future?

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Second: As we work to rebuild economically, how do we ensure equitable economic development that will improve Kansas City for the next generation?

Third: How do we keep Kansas Citians safe, implement transformative, long-term violence prevention strategies, and build community trust?

On the first question: Over 100 years ago, influenza posed a grave threat and took the lives of millions. Kansas City was not spared. Then-Mayor James Cowgill, Health Director E.H. Bullock, health and school leaders took aggressive action—in some ways far too inconsistently so—but ones that changed life for Kansas Citians: closing schools and theaters; limiting gatherings to 20 persons. Kansas City's early interventions were effective in limiting the spread of the Spanish Flu, but our city's too-early-reopening doomed many. Ultimately, more than 2,300 Kansas Citians died of the Flu in less than nine months.

Those were statistics and actions this Kansas City mayor and our Kansas City Health Director, Dr. Rex Archer, were not bound to repeat. Before any cases were reported in the Kansas City metropolitan area, I convened our department directors to prepare for COVID's arrival in our community. On March 12 of last year, we declared a State of Emergency in Kansas City for the first time in over half a century. The early intervention prescribed by Dr. Archer, Emergency Medical Services Director Dr. Erica Carney, and our talented local health experts was indeed tough medicine.

No mayor wants to close schools. No mayor wants to cancel weddings, graduations, or to see our small, locally-owned businesses suffer. But, I'm a human first. And, at no time could I stand to avoid taking action, knowing that it would lead to hundreds, if not thousands of more lives lost in Kansas City. Every life is indeed precious and too many families lost loved ones in this horrendous year.

Almost all of us know someone who COVID took from us, some of us several, and for some families, even more. Among those families is the family of a woman you may have gotten to know from our press conferences this year, that of our sign language interpreter, Michelle DeMartino, who lost both her parents to COVID-19 just this week. She still came today because she wanted to share our message with all of you. But, I say to her: we grieve for you and your family, and we will never stop working to keep others from experiencing the pain that you and your loved ones have had to endure.

In addition to so many of your families, our family of City workers has not been spared from COVID-19, as we lost Kansas City Fire Department EMT Billy Birmingham; Kansas City Fire Department communications specialist and paramedic Scott Davidson; Kansas City Fire Captain Robert "Bobby" Rocha; and Kansas City Water Services employee TJ Morales.

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All told, as of last week, we have lost 454 Kansas Citians to COVID-19. Even though our COVID death rates fall below peer cities like Baltimore, Denver, and St. Louis, I am disappointed that our interventions could not save more lives and I remain resolved that we will continue to take all actions necessary, despite meritless legal challenges or non-scientific-based political opposition about masks, to save lives and limit the spread of COVID-19.

As someone who believes in medicine and science, we will never stop having as our primary goal how we can make our community safer. Our rules have not been easy, but I will never gamble with my mother's life or yours for temporary economic gains.

That does not mean we have ignored our economic challenges. While we will continue to work in Washington and Jefferson City to create further aid to stem the harsh economic conditions so many of our small businesses face, Kansas City has led in supporting our small businesses, neighborhoods, and entrepreneurs:

- Kansas City was the first and to this day one of few cities in our region that just weeks into the pandemic created a small business relief fund for struggling businesses that eventually provided \$3.2 million to our friends and neighbors;
- By late March, we crafted rules to expand outdoor seating, dining, and drinking—changes that I will move to make permanent in Kansas City;
- The City is deferring, and in some cases, waiving, fees for small businesses with less than \$4 million in annual revenues; and
- Kansas City has already allocated \$7 million in emergency rental assistance for families struggling to pay their rent, and through support from the federal government and Congressman Cleaver and Senator Blunt, we will soon be distributing \$15 million in rental assistance over the next year.

But the most important thing we can do for our economy, our businesses, and our neighbors is to take the COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available to you. Consumers in Kansas City need to feel safe again to dine together, to be around one another, to cheer on our local teams as we did before. The way we do that is continuing the progress we've made so far by wearing masks, but it also requires us to effectively vaccinate the vast majority of our population.

I have heard from many, particularly in our Black and brown communities, about concerns with the vaccine given the history of inoculations in our country and the speed with which the vaccines came to production. I have visited with inner city health organizations and groups that work with the developmentally disabled where up to half of employees have declined the vaccines.

I get the concerns. I get your fears. But, know that it is safe. These vaccines have been tested and they are the way we get back to life in some semblance of how we knew it before.

For many other Kansas Citians, the concern is not of the vaccine itself, but of our inadequate vaccine rollout in our country, state, and city.

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Ensuring fast, efficient, and equitable vaccine distribution throughout the city is of the utmost importance over the months ahead.

The Kansas City Health Department is doing all that it can to work its way through our list of those interested in receiving a COVID vaccine, vaccinating more than 1,000 vulnerable Kansas Citizens per week.

In addition to our Health Department, we are working with engineering firm, Burns & McDonnell, and our Kansas City-based hospitals and community health organizations to ramp up vaccination opportunities by the thousands each week in Kansas City.

We know we need more vaccines from the state. We will continue to demand it. But, we will do all we can to make sure we are getting out whatever we have as quickly and fairly as possible. I will not pass the buck to another government level. We will make sure that we are on top of vaccinations. That's why I am proud that our government is one of few that through our Health Department helps those without internet access sign up for appointments and calls back through our list when vaccines become available.

Beyond our health and small business challenges, COVID-19 has also devastated Kansas City's budget.

During last year's Address we discussed new and innovative changes in what we deemed the "Most Equitable Budget in Kansas City's History." I was proud to highlight priorities like Zero Fare Transit; the Tenant Advocate; and millions of dollars more to patch potholes and resurface our roads.

Today, I come to you with a different tone—one of greater fiscal responsibility and austerity than we have seen in years.

Like many American cities, the economic slowdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant revenue reductions for Kansas City.

Such a challenging year has left the City to make difficult decisions as we plan for the next fiscal year. We have a leaner budget, but we also have a better plan to remove snow off the roads more quickly; to fill more potholes—10,000 of which we filled last year; to avoid utility companies tearing up newly-repaved streets; to ensure buses remain fare-free; and to efficiently deliver basic city services to all residents. And we plan to increase by over \$10 million our investment in road resurfacing and repavement to avoid the all-too-familiar concerns in Kansas City with crumbling roads, bridges, and infrastructure.

Despite our positive changes and plans, we confront the reality of a revenue shortfall of more than \$70 million as compared to last year's budget. The budget to be introduced moves the \$70 million forecast shortfall down to only \$15 million.

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As a child of a long-time government employee, I know that taking care of the people who keep this city running each day is one of the most important things we can do. That's why it was essential to me that no City employees will be laid off due to budgetary concerns. No public works staff, no parks and recreation staff, no fire fighters or EMS, and no one in the Kansas City Police Department—despite what you've perhaps previously heard. No officer will need to lose their jobs due to budget cuts, and no stations need be closed. Instead we will right-size budgets in all our departments, eliminating wasteful spending, leaving most currently vacant positions unfilled.

Every day, 7,000 people go to work for this great city and we will not leave them behind, even at this challenging time.

In addition, we will present a budget with:

1. No furloughs;
2. No reductions in essential city services;
3. Targeted investments in priority areas, including but not limited to:
 - a. Expanded snow removal operations;
 - b. Doubling our investment in street resurfacing;
 - c. Additional support for our unhoused population;
 - d. Significant steps to improve equity and to help build a more inclusive and supportive organization by hiring the City's first ever Chief Equity Officer; and
 - e. Creation of our first ever Transportation Director and other resources to help us aggressively redesign our streets to reduce traffic deaths and serious injuries.

Closing the budget gap also requires a long list of “surgical” cuts and adjustments to how we fund city services, including:

- a. Transitioning to “in house” waste removal and leaf and brush collection services;
- b. Negotiated reductions in healthcare costs for the city and auditing existing coverage to ensure cost effectiveness;
- c. Converting streetlights to more energy efficient LED lights;
- d. Removing all but essential City travel and special events budgets;
- e. Eliminating hundreds of currently unfilled positions—again, avoiding the mass layoffs of our workers seen in other cities and states;
- f. Right sizing the KCPD budget to match current staffing and consolidating services to provide more efficient response;
- g. Offering voluntary early retirement incentives for all of our staff having accumulated at least 20 years of service;
- h. Sale of unused city property;
- i. Refinancing existing debt;
- j. Consolidating office space into unused areas of City Hall;
- k. Reductions in contracts with outside vendors including security guards, jail contracts, and consultants; and

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1. Selling off underused vehicles and empty City-owned buildings, including the Hale Arena, which currently costs the city \$1.7 million a year to maintain.

Despite these and millions more in creative cost savings, we will still need to make across-the-board cuts to many of our beloved institutions. Rather than eliminate contracts altogether, this budget will, regrettably, reduce appropriations this year only to the Kansas City Zoo, Starlight Theatre, ArtsKC, the Black Archives of Mid-America, Visit KC, Legal Aid of Western Missouri, and the Kansas City Film Office.

These decisions were not made lightly. Each of the listed organizations is vital to the cultural, educational, and recreational fabric of our city and we will work to ensure that any change in appropriations hold their dedicated staff harmless as we look to cut consulting, marketing, and other administrative expenses.

Most of our City departments will also be faced with budget reductions, including the Kansas City Police Department. Let me note again that no Kansas City police officers will be laid off, and these budget reductions will not result in any fewer officers than we have available today to respond when needed. There will be budget space to hire replacements for those officers and 911 call-takers currently at the department who may leave in the year ahead.

As a councilman and mayor, I have voted to increase the police budget each year. I support the rank and file's hard work for our community each day, and that's why we will continue to seek cost-savings alternatives, such as grants and policing collaborations and further exploring the KCI policing issue.

I know there are some who will want tens of millions of dollars more cut from the police budget. Some will want millions more in budget increases. In this submitted budget, we make a financial decision, not a political one. We will continue our important conversations on the future of policing and safety in Kansas City. But the choices we discuss tonight and roll out tomorrow are based on budget facts and realities—not criminal justice debates. This budget sets a responsible balance on necessary adjustments for fiscal solvency and our need to ensure you're not placed on hold when you call 911.

In addition, we'll continue seeking ways to build a safer community outside of policing, such as engaging fully with the Health Department's blueprint for violence that looks to enhance community services, mental health and mentoring investments, growing employment opportunities in our city's core, and support to reduce crime before it starts.

We also will continue to explore how we can accomplish the same right-sizing goals with the Kansas City Fire Department.

Our strategic budget reductions will ensure the City services Kansas Citians pay us to provide will not suffer. Our Police and Fire Departments, our 911 call responders, will maintain their responsiveness.

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Our snowplows, under the City's new snow plan, will continue the great work they've been doing to quickly clear off our highways and roads. Our potholes will continue getting filled. Our roads resurfaced. Our airport will continue being built. We will maintain and improve City services for Kansas Citians in all neighborhoods.

As we work to rebuild economically, how do we ensure equitable development that will improve Kansas City for the next generation?

When I think about the minimum wage-earning single parent in Kansas City, I think of my own mother doing her best to raise me and my sisters with low wages and a high cost of living, no matter how modestly we approached spending.

An important step my administration and this Council took was to approve legislation which requires organizations that do substantial business with the City to pay all workers a humane wage of at least \$15 an hour by 2025.

I am extremely proud that after many years of work by a coalition of advocates, this Council last month unanimously approved a new affordable housing policy ordinance that mandates all housing projects that receive taxpayer subsidies from the City rent at least 20 percent of their units at affordable rates, so people of all income levels can find safe and affordable housing.

And our work continues to reform the City's economic development processes, supporting prevailing wages for our workers and investing in entrepreneurs in all parts of our city.

Kansas City has a multitude of economic development agencies, boards and commissions. Today, each of these entities is interpreting economic development policies independently, with different rules of engagement. As a result, many members of our community perceive disparities in priorities, processes, and outcomes.

As we seek to grow Kansas City equitably, we need to streamline the way the City reviews and participates in development projects.

To that end, I am pursuing the development of a unified board for economic development review, which will look to combine our existing economic incentive boards, including the Port Authority of Kansas City.

Having a unified board will allow us to more effectively coordinate and assess the impact, public benefit, and financing of projects with a unique ability to:

- Consider project need, valuing public input over taxpayer-subsidized luxury development out of the reach of most Kansas Citians; and
- Save developers costs by streamlining administrative processes and reducing timelines for development and city approvals.

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No longer should we develop out of fear of falling behind. We should invest in development because we think it's right... for all Kansas Citians.

We want growth; we want new jobs; new attractions; to build density, but, simply put: if the public is incentivizing development, that development should benefit the public.

Question three: How do we keep Kansas Citians safe?

During all but seven of the full 36 years of my life, over 100 lives were lost to homicide—that's nearly 4,000 Kansas Citians murdered since 1984. Although the trends nationwide have increased in the past several years, and even more so during the pandemic, this is not new to Kansas City.

In 2020, we lost 176 of our brothers and sisters to homicide. And some of our youngest victims—LeGenD Taliferro, Tyron Payton—didn't even make it to their fifth birthdays.

Change can and must be made.

One of the first homicides this year was 16-year-old Jayson Ugwuh—the third homicide victim in his family. His brother, 9-year-old Jayden Ugwuh and cousin, 8-year-old Montell Ross, were both killed by stray bullets entering a home in 2016. A week after Jayson's death, his 21-year-old sister was charged with murder in retaliation for her 16-year-old brother's death. These deaths could have been prevented. All of them.

More often than not, homicides are not random. They happen when there are no readily available support systems, mental health services, no alternative path for reconciliation, and, often, little trust in law enforcement.

Last August, our City's health and public safety leaders stood with me to announce a new comprehensive framework to address Kansas City's epidemic of violent crime.

This framework incorporated four areas of focus:

- **Prevention**, through impactful programs and opportunities that work to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline, improve safe spaces, and remove economic barriers that impede individual success.
- **Intervention**: through identifying individuals most at-risk for committing violent crime and intervene with necessary resources to help set them on the right path.
- **Law Enforcement and the Community**: through accountability measures and increased outreach for law enforcement, encouraging communication and collaboration with the community on the most violent crimes.
- **Administrative Reform**: having fair and equitable laws and community trust in our legal institutions.

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After townhalls and neighborhood walks, we've already made progress:

- We worked to bring in a nationally acclaimed anti-violence program for youth in Kansas City. The Becoming a Man/Working on Womanhood program provides highly engaging counseling, mental health services, trauma support, and mentoring programs for adolescents, and launched early this year in the too-often overlooked Hickman Mills School District, with plans to expand in our community.
- In this budget, we continue to advocate for keeping social workers embedded at every station within the Kansas City Police Department. We also have pursued grants to encourage the hiring of a more diverse police force, especially focused on the recruitment of women, so that our law enforcement is reflective of its community.

In addition to eliminating marijuana possession as a violation of the City Code of Ordinances, I have also directed Municipal Court to increase diversion opportunities for those who cannot afford a lawyer, ensuring poor people aren't burdened by the legal system and don't become repeat players.

Last year, 87 percent of homicides were caused by a firearm. In the same year, we sued a gun manufacturer who helped traffic illegal firearms, which turned up at many homicide scenes, into our city. It subsequently went bankrupt. When they applied for a new sales license, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) awarded one in less than a month. Thereafter, the City sued the ATF. We will not allow companies to profit off of murder in our community.

But there is more work to be done. For years, we have hired more officers, but violent crime has still gone up. Our police officers do the best they can for our city, but this is not a problem they can fix on their own. We must keep being creative and innovative, working with schools, re-entry programs, and our neighborhood and church leaders to push change in all parts of our community.

I have been asked often if I regret stating a goal of bringing our homicide number in Kansas City below 100. Absolutely not. We can have new airports, an extended streetcar, new businesses, great sports teams, but if a baby can't live to see her fifth birthday, then we're nowhere close to the city we need to be.

Our challenges are great, but we can never give up.

I have visited more than 50 classrooms over the past year, and have often done so virtually. In every classroom, there is limitless opportunity. And we owe it to our children to share our faith in brighter days ahead with them.

When I think of great Kansas Citians, I think of one of my colleagues, Lee Barnes. In the past year, he has lost a father, a sister, and more recently, his mother. I have been to two of the memorial services and at each, his son of the same name, spoke.

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His son is probably already richer than me and Councilman Barnes, but in those family settings—where few could be—I saw why we do what we do. Generations ago, the Councilman’s father saw, that despite challenges, discrimination, the pain with which we all deal, he could build a life for his wife and family in Kansas City.

The councilman through the years did the same, so that now, we could see this talented young man, who is out East, a proud KCPS graduate, letting us all know that by not giving up, his grandfather, his grandmother, his father, his mother, and now he, can change the world.

Our trajectory in 2021 may not seem positive to some. Pandemic. Job losses. Racial tensions. But, just as the Barnes family showed us by persevering—in damn hard times—in 1960, 1980, 2000, 2020, and 2021, our city keeps working, keeps grinding, knowing that we’re building a better, safer, and healthier life for all who follow.

Even in our darkest days, know that our work and our sacrifice today develops that bright, impressive, smiling, energetic daughter, son, and leader of tomorrow.

We are a city that cares for the ill, the working poor, those without permanent shelter, and all those who serve our community. And we always will, knowing that our efforts will build an even brighter community for tomorrow.

May God bless you. May God bless our great city.